

Pro-Russia Party Fails to Topple Latvian Government

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Despite polls predicting that a pro-Russia party would win Latvia's weekend elections, the ruling government won a mandate to keep Latvia on the path of IMF-led austerity instead of renewed ties with Russia.

Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis' Unity bloc won 33 seats after the Saturday vote, while his two coalition partners got a combined 30 seats, yielding 63 seats in the 100-seat parliament for a government previously in a minority, election officials said.

Dombrovskis said he would meet the opposition Russian minority party, Harmony Center, which had been hoping to win the election but came in second place with 29 seats, to see whether there was any way the government could cooperate with it.

"We discussed the possibilities for further cooperation, and we are ready to continue work," Dombrovskis told reporters after meeting the Union of Greens and Farmers, which won 22 seats.

He said the aim should be to hold a parliament vote on government approval on Nov. 2.

"We also agreed that Latvia's economic stabilization program and agreement with lenders must be further implemented," he added.

He later met the third coalition partner, the nationalist Everything For Latvia/For Fatherland and Freedom bloc, which won eight seats, and also agreed to work further with them.

The vote was a triumph for Dombrovskis, who has already steered Latvia through harsh budget cuts and tax increases to meet the terms of a 7.5 billion euro (\$10.24 billion) bailout agreed with the International Monetary Fund and the European Union.

Harmony Center, which has Latvia's large Russian minority as its traditional base of support, had been hoping to woo ethnic Latvians to vote for it after the crisis. It had hoped this would propel it to first place in the election and a possible place in government for the first time since the Soviet collapse. It has called for softer anti-crisis measures and closer ties with Russia.

(Reuters, MT)

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